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ABSTRACT

This document explains the Pittsburgh Literacy Initiative (PLI), what role it plays in workplace literacy, what mechanisms it has used, and what has been learned. Section 1 lists the five aspects of the initiative's mission: clearinghouse, screening center, program development, data collection, and literacy promotion. Section 2 describes the organization's efforts, including assessment and referral at work sites, tutoring, analyzing readability, collaborating with the Job Corps, assessing the literacy of welfare recipients, providing literacy and basic skills training at a prerelease rehabilitation program, and developing a job-specific writing skill curriculum for use in adult basic education programs that focus on job training. Seven basic tasks for providers of workplace literacy programs are listed: understand business and union culture and language; develop and market programs that can be provided even though they will not solve all problems; decide who pays for services, especially with volunteer organizations that have a core of professional staff; develop commonly accepted measures to identify and determine competencies; balance employers' frequent goal to evaluate return on this investment with concerns for confidentiality and the use of assessment measures as criteria for layoff and nonpromotion; and market literacy services in the professional manner businesses expect. Next are listed challenges and associated opportunities regarding providing workplace literacy services. The document concludes with promotional information about United Way and the PLI. (CML)

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WORKPLACE LITERACY:

THE PRACTITIONER'S TOOL BOX

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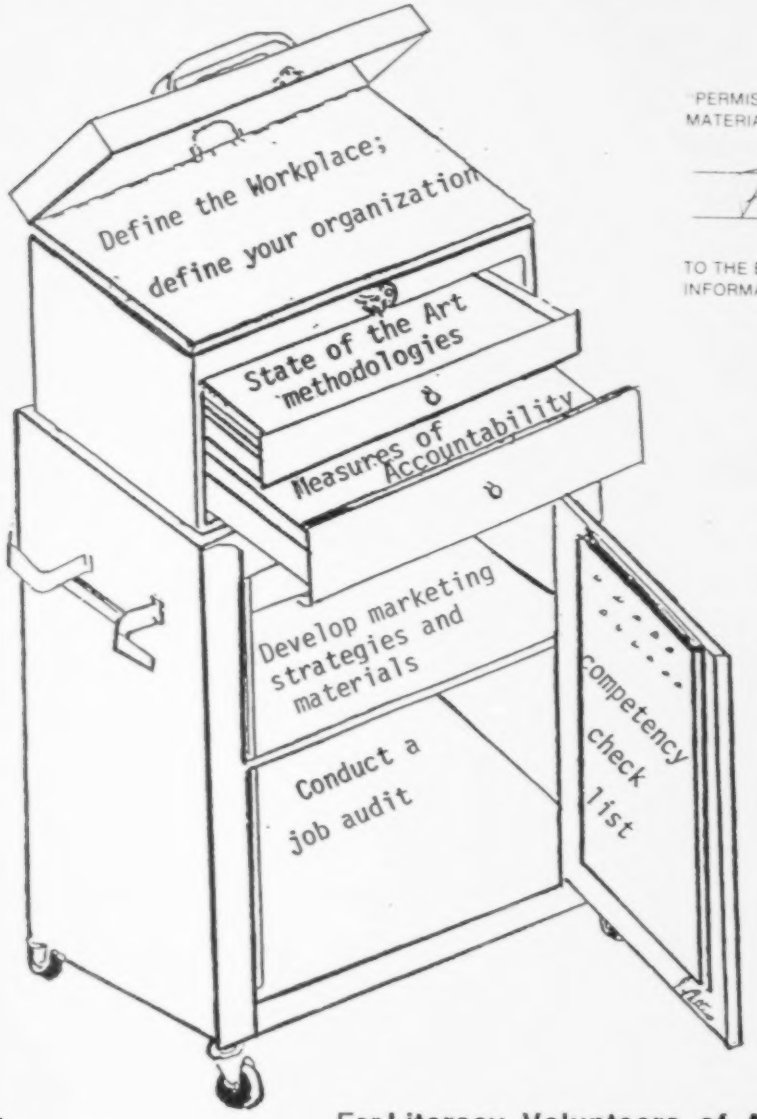

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For **Literacy Volunteers of America** Conference
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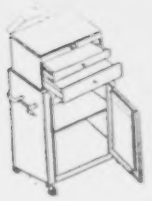

OVERVIEW

I. What is the Pittsburgh Literacy Initiative?

II. What role are we playing in workplace literacy?

III. What mechanisms have we used: how have we done it?

IV. What have we learned?

Pittsburgh Literacy Initiative
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I. **Pittsburgh Literacy Initiative's** mission can be divided into 5 aspects:

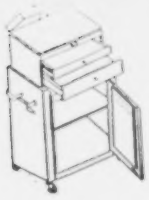
(1) **CLEARINGHOUSE** - to provide the Pittsburgh area with a clearinghouse for information about literacy, outreach efforts, instructional strategies, research, and other state and national initiatives.

(2) **SCREENING CENTER** - to facilitate and maintain a client's placement into the most appropriate literacy program by a process of assessment, referral, and follow-up.

(3) **PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT** - to identify unmet literacy needs within the community and to establish programs or expand existing services to meet these needs. Pilot programs may be initiated and subsequently turned over to an existing agency.

(4) **DATA COLLECTION** - to develop and coordinate cooperative data collection efforts; provide data collection, data management, and analysis services to local literacy agencies, and be a liaison with researchers and others collecting data from outside our area.

(5) **LITERACY PROMOTION** - to promote and coordinate joint outreach and recruitment ventures, as well as new literacy partnerships.



II. What role are we playing in workplace literacy?

PITTSBURGH LITERACY INITIATIVE: WORKPLACE/WORKFORCE LITERACY INITIATIVES

1. Workplace:

a. Assessment and Referral by trained volunteers at work-site.

Nabisco Brands, Inc.	In partnership with Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council (GPLC) and Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC). On-site classes run by Nabisco.
Iron City Uniform and Towel Company	In partnership with CCAC.
Kane Regional Centers	600 Nurses' Aides; on-site programming with CCAC.
Heinz USA	In partnership with GPLC and CCAC. A teacher, hired and trained by GPLC, holds a bi-weekly on-site class, teaching basic reading and organizational skills. Program is in second year. Suspended while Heinz evaluates and plans expansion of workplace literacy programming.
Equitable Gas Company	Meter Readers facing termination due to computerization.

b. Off-Site Programming-paid tutors.

R.O.A.D./PennDot	Pennsylvania Department of Education contract to instruct for Commercial Drivers License Exam. Curriculum developed by Penn State Univ. Institute of Adult Literacy.

c. Readability Analysis as paid consultants.

Nabisco Brands, Inc.	Memos; instruction manuals.
Equitable Gas Company Penelec	Consumer Communications Disconnection notice, instruction manuals, billings.
Eat 'N Park	Training manuals and memos.

2. Workforce:

a. Assessment and Referral by trained volunteers.

Institute for Security Technology	PLI provides diagnostic and assessment for referral to appropriate community literacy programs.
PA Job Centers	Diagnostic assessment for appropriate referral by PLI/ Job Center Counselors.
Jobstart	17-21 year olds preparing for workplace. PLI diagnostic assessment used to give baseline and for curriculum design.
Community College of Allegheny County - Recruitment Outreach Program	Pre-college level recruitment in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Assessment determines appropriate CCAC or literacy program referral.

b. Job Corps Collaborative.

In response to request from State Job Corps Director and Department of Education, PLI coordinates three literacy intervention programs:

- Volunteer tutoring as support to low level readers enrolled in ABE classes.
- Family Literacy component of day-care center using volunteers.
- Referral to computer-based service provider for small group math instruction - by paid tutor.

c. Literacy Assessment of Single Point of Contact (SPOC) Clients.

PLI is under JTPA contract to provide the literacy assessment component of this pre-employment program for Welfare recipients, to assist case workers make appropriate educational referrals - paid staff only.

d. Literacy/Job Search Skills.

PLI is under contract with Pittsburgh Job Training Partnership (JTPA) to provide an Adult Literacy and Job Placement Program at a). Alpha House, a pre-release rehabilitation program for substance abusers and

b). Allegheny County Jail. The Literacy/Basic Skills training is augmented by job development skills. Once placed, the Job Developer provides counseling support to ensure appropriate workplace behaviors for the first three months of employment.

e. Curriculum Development.

A "Writing for Work" curriculum has been developed by PLI as a Special Experimental Demonstration Project funded by Section 353 of the Adult Education Act through PA Department of Education.

This job-specific writing skill curriculum is for use in ABE programs which focus on job training. Local employers have cooperated in providing details of the writing/communication skills required of entry level employees. (Employers include AETNA Insurance, Allegheny General Hospital, Biodecision Laboratories, Braddock General Hospital, Contravis Goerz Corporation, Equitable Gas Company, Kaufmann's, Landmark Savings, Nabisco Brands Inc., Presbyterian University Hospital and Schneider Construction Company). The curriculum was field-tested at two job training programs - Alpha House and Connelley Skill Learning Center - prior to its dissemination to programs which prepare adults for the workplace.

III. MECHANISMS FOR "GETTING TO THE TABLE"

Collaboratives with other Service Providers:

- United Way of Allegheny County;
- Literacy Service Providers - especially Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council and Community College of Allegheny County;
- Pennsylvania Department of Education;
- University of Pittsburgh;
- Penn State University - Institute of Adult Literacy.

Contacts made through:

- United Way/PLUS Task Force;
- Role as regional assessment center and clearinghouse;
- Attendance at state/regional workshops/conferences;
- Media exposure;
- Direct approach to businesses.

IV. WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

What educators/literacy service providers have to do:
i.e. In order for literacy educators to be seen as equal partners in workplace/force collaborative efforts, able to "define the problem" and propose appropriate solutions, we

must "put our own house in order" so that we can serve as literacy brokers between the employer and employee. There is a need to understand and learn how to respond to this new and different environment for learning.

Some Basic Tasks:

1. Understand business/union culture and language. Do homework on individual workplace, hierarchy of decision makers. Don't assume union/management communication. Be prepared for opposition.

2. Collaborate together as literacy service providers before we collaborate with business so that we speak with a united voice re-terminology, evaluation, curricula.

3. Develop and market what programs can be provided, recognizing that a single program cannot fulfill the range of needs; build a continuum of service.

4. Decide issues of who pays for services. How do we define "volunteer" in the workplace context? [Most volunteer organizations have a core professional paid staff].

5. Develop commonly accepted measures to identify and determine competencies.

6. Balance employers' frequent goal to evaluate return on this investment (in basic skills) with very real concerns for:

   - confidentiality, and
   - the use of assessment measures as criteria for layoff, downward reclassification, non-promotion.

7. Be prepared to market literacy services in the professional manner businesses expect. Literacy is a recognized term. The positive relationship between basic skills and productivity is frequently not. Communication skills and well-produced materials are crucial.

In Summary:

- There is a need to understand the workplace.
- Most workplace programs begin in response to change - pay attention to local worksite expansion, investment in computerized machinery, new technology.
- There is a need to understand our resources and sharpen our own teaching techniques.
- Ensure familiarity with latest teaching material, CAI, materials, training methods.

- There is a need to clarify our own mission and philosophy before entering this new learning situation.
- Ensure the mission of helping the student is not compromised by workplace demands.

IV. What have we learned?

Challenge:

NEED TO BALANCE NEEDS OF LEARNER WITH NEEDS OF EMPLOYER

Opportunity:

Convergence between higher order skills required by workplace and needs of employees for continuum of education which includes but goes beyond basic skills.

Challenge:

NEED TO BALANCE NEEDS OF LEARNER WITH CONSTRAINTS OF LIMITED FUNDS FOR PUBLIC PROGRAMS.

Opportunity:

To build a continuum of service through the collaboration of agencies concerned with workforce literacy, thus combining funding sources and knowledge/expertise.

Challenge:

NEED FOR COMMUNICATION AMONG EMPLOYERS, EMPLOYEES, UNIONS AND EDUCATORS

Opportunity:

Business needs can drive expanded provision of services and innovative, relevant curricula throughout educational system.

Challenge:

NEED TO DEVELOP COMMONLY ACCEPTED MEASURES OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Opportunity:

1. For educators to improve tools to measure basic skills.
2. For an increase in business support for workplace literacy when educators can document results and demonstrate return on investment.

Challenge:

NEED FOR EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY TO RESPOND TO NON-TRADITIONAL BASIC SKILLS

e.g. development of inter-personal, problem-solving, reasoning, computer skills.

Opportunity:

For educators to develop comprehensive definitions and programs in the field of workplace literacy.

"The complexity of these issues demands collaborative action — none of them can be effectively dealt with in isolation."
Arlene Fingeret

Report on the National Forum on Literacy Collaboration and Policy Issues

for literacy learners, practitioners, leaders and policy makers

June 15-17, 1989
Washington, D.C.

Sponsored by
Literacy Network, Inc.

Issue:
Literacy Basic Skills and the Workforce

This group examined the following workforce-related challenges: the need to balance needs of both learner and employer; the need to balance learner needs with constraints of limited funds; the need for communication among employers, employees, unions and educators; and the need to develop commonly accepted measures of accountability. After exchanging ideas on those issues, the group recommended the development of advocacy strategies to work with both government and private sector funders. The whole range of stakeholders must be represented: employers, employees (both union and non-union), unemployed, civic groups and educators. They stated that literacy educators must dissipate tension by: speaking with a united voice; understanding business/union culture and language; increasing labor/management participation in the Literacy Network; developing staff training in workforce education/job-related adult education; and finding means and dollars to focus on the needs of the small business workforce including E.S.L. By demonstrating the ability to work collaboratively with the workforce, the group concluded it would then be seen as an equal partner able to define the problem.

Facilitator: Frances Wright

UNITED WAY AT WORK

UNITED WAY AT WORK addresses the needs of both companies and their employees by linking community services to the workplace. These services have the value added benefit of helping employees with personal problems while assisting companies to build a qualified workforce.

To maintain a productive workforce, employers are becoming increasingly sensitive and responsive to the personal needs and family concerns of their workers. Such problems as depression, drug & alcohol abuse, and poor health habits affect work performance, and increase attrition and absenteeism. Inadequate basic literacy skills and the need for day care, for both children and elderly relatives of employees are preventing many people from entering or remaining in the workforce.

The United Way and its member agencies have a long history of addressing many of these social problems, now coming to light as workplace problems.

UNITED WAY AT WORK is an effort to apply these traditional community services to the workplace.

The inserts in the left side of this packet describe some of these United Way At Work programs and explains how employees and their companies may take advantage of them.

For more information about these programs, please use the enclosed response card and return it to the United Way of Allegheny County.

WORKPLACE LITERACY

Basic skills and literacy improvement for workers

Problem:

Adult illiteracy and poor basic skills are a major problem in the current workforce and a threat to future economic development. Low literacy and inadequate basic skills negatively impact competitiveness, productivity and safety.

- Estimates of lost productivity due to inadequately prepared employees range as high as $225 billion annually.
- At least 35 million Americans are functionally illiterate with reading, writing and other skills are at or below a Fifth-grade level. Another 35 million to 45 million are believed to be only marginally literate-below the reading level needed to function well in today's society.
- At a time when the average new job will require 13.5 years of educations, 2 million students drop out of U.S. schools each year.
- Forty percent of all current jobs require limited literacy skills, but it is estimated that only 27% of new created jobs fall into the low-skill category.

Response:

Business/Education partnerships can address the problem of the lack of basic skills in the workforce in any work environment--large or small, rural or metropolitan. Pittsburgh LIteracy Initiative provides services which can assist employees and employers in the following ways:

- Provide confidential assessment of employees' basic skills.
- Provide assessment of job skills and competencies in order to develop job specific curricula and proficiency levels.
- Provide readability analysis and re-writing services to improve the effective communication of workplace documents.
- Develop workforce programs customized to meet individual business needs located at the worksite or referral to programs located off-site.

For more information, contact Pittsburgh Literacy Initiative at 392-3112